DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 220 447 SP 020 824

AUTHOR Purvis, Johnny R.; Kramer, Patsy
TITLE Teacher Concerns: A Position Paper.
PUB DATE [80]
NOTE 15p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Responsibility; Admission Criteria; *Economic Status; Labor Turnover; Student Attitudes; *Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Certification; *Teacher Education; *Teacher Morale; Teacher Persistence; Teacher Salaries; *Teaching (Occupation); *Teaching Conditions

ABSTRACT

Prospective teachers must face numerous pressures and difficulties during their training and subsequent negative factors in their lives as professionals. Among the conditions that exist for the prospective teacher, economic constraints play an important role. Pressures also exist during student teaching, when students must attempt to please both a cooperating teacher and a college supervisor who may have divergent approaches. Another stressful factor may be the anxiety caused by the necessity of passing the National Teacher's Examination. Practicing teachers also face conditions that affect morale and can sometimes cause them to abandon the teaching profession. As it was in student days, economics is again an important factor in the teacher's working life. Salaries are low and not comparable to those in other professions, and social status is not high. The demands of the classroom involve not only the problem of discipline; along with coping with disruptive or difficult students, teachers are also required to accept responsibility for social programs such as sex education, mainstreaming, family living, and bilingual education. Teachers are also frequently required to assume a larger teaching load as schools are closed and students transferred. Steps for ameliorating these negative conditions include: (1) careful screening for entrance into teacher education programs; (2) maintaining high standards for retention in schools of education; (3) providing additional professional education courses and/or extensive work in current courses in the areas of social concerns; (4) basing teachers' salaries upon competence as well as degrees earned; (5) reducing student teacher ratio; (6) improving school facilities, equipment, and teaching materials; (7) expanding benefits for teachers, such as sabbaticals and improved pension plans; and (8) more supportive school administration. (JD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED220447

TEACHER CONCERNS: A POSITION PAPER

Johnny R. Purvis
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
University of Southern Mississippi
Box 5057
Hattiesburg, Mississippi 39401

Patsy Kramer
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
University of Southern Mississippi
Box 5057
Hattiesburg, Mississippi 39401

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☑ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Johnny R. Purvis

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

SP 020 824

TEACHER CONCERNS: A POSITION PAPER

One of the most important functions of any society is educating its youth. Accordingly, an institution entitled a "school" has been established to perform this function for most youth in almost any given society. In order to function a public school must have both students and professionally prepared individuals (teachers). Since these teachers play an important role in society, let us examine several areas related to their preparation and actual teaching situations.

First, there is a need to look at the status of the American teacher in regard to several important events. Today there are fewer students enrolling in teacher preparation programs in our nation's colleges or universities. On the other end of the continuum, the number of teacher education graduates has dropped for the past several years with a four percent decrease occurring between 1977 and 1978 (Riggs and Lewis, 1980). As a result of both of these facts, a considerable teacher shortage has occurred in such curriculum areas as mathematics and science (Akin, 1980).

Women, one of the traditional sources of teachers, are not entering the teaching profession in great numbers as they once were. This is possibly due to the many opportunities in a variety of professions that have opened up for them in the last few years. In addition, there is simply not an adequate supply of men in and/or going into the teaching profession, especially at the elementary school level.

Fewer men and women are staying in the teaching profession for a variety of reasons. Many experienced teachers are often quitting the teaching profession at a time when they have probably acquired adequate experience to take advantage of and apply these years of experience. At this point in their teaching career, they have the potential for becoming more effective teachers than they were at the beginning of their careers.

The reader might ask the question, "What are some of the conditions that have brought about the previously discussed events?" Naturally, a person would quickly think about the declining elementary and secondary school-age population. This is an important factor; however, there are several other factors that should be discussed from the following two areas: (1) pre-teaching conditions existing during the prospective teacher's college or university preparation to become a teacher and (2) teaching conditions existing during the actual teaching tenure of a teacher.

The conditions that exist for the prospective teacher during the academic preparation to become a teacher vary from institution to institution. These conditions play an important role in determining whether a student continues pursuit of a teaching degree. Of course, the pressures to obtain a degree determine to a great extent not only whether an individual "passes" course work, but also in which particular teaching speciality (subject area) the person chooses to obtain a teaching certificate.

The cost of obtaining a degree can certainly be a financial burden on the student and very often on the student's family. In addition, the student is losing income that could be acquired while attending a college or university for approximately four years. In actuality, the prospective teacher may be losing money on two fronts.

In general, the prospective teacher participates in student teaching (sometimes called practice teaching) during the individual's senior year. During this phase of preparation, pressures from the college or university supervisor and the assigned supervising teacher in the elementary or secondary school are often present. An example of one of the pressures that a student teacher might have to struggle with may result from the college or university supervisor desiring one thing and the supervising teacher wanting another. Thus, the student teacher is often caught in a situation in which an attempt is made to please both parties to receive an excellent grade and a good recommendation at the conclusion of student teaching which the student teacher realizes will probably be examined by prospective employers. Accordingly, the student teacher has to continually walk a tight-rope in order not to offend either individual.

The pressure that is often brought about by the National Teacher's Examination (NTE) is another important factor. Many states now require a minimum score on the NTE before an individual can receive a teaching certificate. In addition, some states vary the minimum score for certification according to

the student's teaching speciality. Now think about this for a moment, a student struggles through the many trials and tribulations of obtaining a degree in a given teaching speciality and then cannot become a certified teacher in many states until a minimum score is obtained on the NTE. This is a very important issue when a student can obtain a degree in many other areas that are not only more financial rewarding than teaching, but does not require a minimum score on some type of standardized test such as the NTE.

Now, let us look at several of the conditions that exist in teaching situations that are not only effecting the morale of the American teacher, but are causing many teachers to abandon the teaching profession. As a result, these teachers are seeking other professions in which they can apply the skills they have acquired in their former profession and/or while obtaining their degree.

One of the most important reasons that many teachers are leaving the teaching profession is related to economics. The question is often asked, "Is the salary a teacher receives appropriate in relation to the investment (time and money) an individual has made in obtaining a degree?" The reader may desire to examine starting salaries for beginning teachers and compare them to other professions that require a baccalaureate degree. In addition, the reader may also desire to compare salaries of experienced teachers with those of similar years of experience in other professions. By the way, be sure to compare not only by the number of years of experience, but by additional degrees earned as well.

There is possibly nothing more of an emotional drain on a classroom teacher's energies on a day-to-day basis than student discipline. In many public schools in our nation, discipline is not only a constant problem, but a constant worry related to anticipating what type of disturbance a particular student and/or group of students will create next.

Another source of continued pressure that is often associated with student discipline is the legal issues that are related to the teaching progession. This phenomenon could possibly come in the form of a malpractice suite, tort liability, and a violation of an individual's rights. Accordingly, today's public classroom teacher is constantly performing a balancing act in an effort to avoid a law suite and still maintain order in the classroom.

In the past few years our public schools have been mandated to accept responsibility for programs similar to the following: career education, economic education, special education students in the classroom due to Public Law 94-142, accountability, sex education, family living, citizenship education, bilingual education, and others. It is true that additional programs in our public schools are sometimes taught by specialists, but most of these additional programs are added to the regular classroom teacher's teaching load of reading, mathematics, science, social studies, and other subjects the teacher is responsible for teaching. Thus, the burdens of many of our nation's classroom teachers actually increase instead of decrease.

In regard to the students that a teacher has assigned to their classroom, there is not only an increased diversity in the student population (academic ability, language differences, value system, interests, career interests, physical abilities, and others), but often an increase in the number of students. The increased diversity in our public school's population is probably brought about by such factors as the increase in the number of students who are now staying in school rather than dropping out and by the number of educationally and physically handicapped students who are now attending public schools rather than being housed in institutions. A possible reason for the increase in the number of students in a classroom is due to the fact that when a school's enrollment declines the school will often loose teachers due to the number of students required for each teacher employed. Thus, when a given teacher is dropped from a school's faculty, other teachers will have to absorb the terminated teacher's students.

In many teaching situations, there is little incentive for a classroom teacher to do an excellent job. A teacher might ask the question, "Why should I do a good job teaching in this school when no one will appreciate it anyway?" One of the key factors that has brought about this attitude is related to the fact that salaries are often based on the number of years of teaching experience and university or college credit earned. In other words, the reward for outstanding teaching is very often based on criteria that is external to teaching performance in the classroom.

The lack of public respect has often damaged the teaching career of many teachers. This lack of respect may have been brought about by the patrons of a school district expecting more than the school system can actually deliver. There should be more community and school participation in joint ventures in order for each group to understand the other's expectations, limitations, and concerns. In other words, the lack of public respect and expectations by the local school community might very well be brought about by a communication gap between both parties.

Based on the previously mentioned conditions and factors related to teacher preparation and actual teaching situations, the following suggestions for improving the teaching profession are presented. The ideas that will be presented are divided into two areas: (1) pre-teaching conditions existing during the teacher's college or university preparation to become a teacher and (2) teaching conditions existing during the actual teaching tenure of a teacher. The reader should bear in mind that the following suggestions are simply proposed ideas and are certainly not intended to be conclusive.

Pre-teaching

1. Screening for entrance into teacher preparation programs is an important area. The following suggestions are offered in regard to screening students who desire to enter a teacher preparation program in a college or university:

a. Evidence of a grade of "C" or higher in at least two English writing courses.

b. Evidence of having earned at least fifty-four (54) semester hours of college credit with a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 2.5 on a four point scale.

c. Evidence of having completed at least thirty (30) observation/participation clock hours in an elementary or secondary school. This activity will provide the student with additional data in regard to making a decision to enter the teaching profession and to provide the student with classroom experience that will further expand professional experiences through observing what is occurring in a school.

d. Evidence of having completed the following standardized examinations in regard to possible remediation and/or counseling:

(1) Writing proficiency exam

(2) Reading proficiency exam

(3) Oral language proficiency exam

(4) Personality assessment exam

2. Retention in the teaching preparation program after the student has been accepted into the program could be based on such factors as the following:

a. Evidence of maintaining a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 2.5.

b. Evidence of having earned a grade of "C" or higher in each professional education course included in the student's educational program.

c. Evidence of having earned a grade of "C" or higher in each course in the student's teaching speciality (mathematics, biology, chemistry, social studies, physical education, and others).

3. Suggested conditions necessary for completing the teacher preparation program are as follows:
   a. Evidence of having met all the requirements set forth under the previous headings (screening and retention).
   b. Evidence of having attained a satisfactory performance level in the specified competencies for each teacher preparation course, including student teaching.
4. Upgrade the college or university teacher preparation program by providing additional professional education courses and/or extensive work in current courses in the following areas: student discipline, public realtions, school law, and an emphasis on various teaching strategies/styles that match various learning styles of students. In addition, teacher preparation programs can probably be upgraded by instituting an "experienced based teacher preparation program." This type of teacher preparation program would involve the student working with a regular classroom teacher while the student is also enrolled in professional education courses. The student would then apply the concepts studied in that classroom under the supervision of both the classroom teacher and the college or university teacher.

Teaching

The following suggestions are presented in an effort to illustrate ideas for recruiting and retaining competent teachers:

1. Teachers' salaries should not only be based on degrees earned and years of experience, but also on teacher competency. In other words, competent teachers should be rewarded for their ability to teach and communicate with students. In addition, competent teachers should be rewarded with salaries that are competitive with other professions which require similar preparation and experience. Therefore, to retain competent people in the teaching profession, they must receive salaries that will enable them to continue teaching and not seek employment in other professions.
2. In order to assist in reducing student discipline problems, to meet the needs of the increasing number of special education students, and to simply enable classroom teachers to meet the individual needs of all students in their classrooms, there is a need to reduce the teacher-student ratio.
3. In an effort to increase the effectiveness of classroom teachers and to improve the learning conditions/opportunities (vocational and academic) for students, there is a need to upgrade and provide additional school facilities, equipment. teaching materials, and textbooks.

4. In addition to increasing the salaries of competent teachers, there is a need to add and/or expand benefits for teachers in areas similar to the following: health insurance, sabbatical leave, legal/liability insurance, workman's compensation, college tuition credit, and others.
5. In order to provide competent assistance and leadership for the classroom teacher, it is necessary to have competent school administrators and school board members. These individuals must be aware of the conditions that exist in our nation's public schools and also possess the skills for effective change and leadership.

In conclusion, the intent of this article was to convey some of the concerns that are often faced by our nation's public school teachers and to present several ideas that may assist in reducing and/or solving some of the problems that public classroom teachers are confronted with on almost a daily basis. The time has come for both educators and the public to work together in an effort to solve many of the problems facing this nation's public schools. It is also time for both parties to decide who is responsible for what and work together to accomplish these tasks. In other words, if the public is going to demand better schools, teacher preparation institutions must produce competent teachers. On the other hand, the public must provide salaries and other benefits that will entice our nation's most capable students to seek careers as teachers and reward competent classroom teachers in an effort to retain them in the teaching

profession. If the situations presented are not corrected and/or solved, our nation's public school system could become a second or third rate educational system.

References

Akin, J. N. Teacher supply/demand 1981. Madison, Wisconsin: Association for School, College and University Staffing, 1980.

Riggs, R. O., & Lewis, W. L. Teacher education in the 1980s: a presidential perspective. Contemporary Education, 1980, 51, 214-217.